

# Should visors be mandatory in the NHL?

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Of late, much of the safety discussion around the NHL has focused on concussions and brain injuries - for a lot of good reasons. But Manny Malhotra's terrible eye injury - suffered last week, which will keep the Vancouver Canucks' centre out for the balance of the season and playoffs - raises an old question again: Should visor use be mandatory?

More and more, the NHL players association is stepping up its crusade against injuries in the sport, but on visors, they've always taken a different tack and argued that it should be a matter of personal choice. Why? Because internally, when they've surveyed their membership about the matter, they've discovered that's what their membership largely wants.

Some players simply believe they cannot function properly on the ice, if they wear a visor. Remember Colby Armstrong, back in January, on the Toronto Maple Leafs' swing through California? He was wearing those Roy Orbison glasses to protect the eye he injured in Atlanta. When Armstrong was cleared to play, he tried it with a visor for a period and then took it off, complaining he couldn't see properly.

That, ultimately, is the conundrum for the players. The NHL game is so fast; and the players need to be so aware of what's happening around them, so if they haven't worn a visor for a while - or at all - it can feel funny and awkward and disorienting. And the last thing an NHL player needs is to be disoriented on the ice. It takes time to adjust and the best way to adjust is to wear one in practice until it becomes second nature, just a part of the equipment. Generally, the players that need eye protection the most - those trying to play soon after an injury like Armstrong - don't have the time or the patience to adapt.

Having said all of that, the visor issue really invites an easy fix.

All the league and the players association needs to do is agree to dig into their collective past and use the same approach they did when helmet use became mandatory: Grandfather it in.

It would mean, for any player already in the NHL, visor use would be optional for the rest of their careers. For any player entering the league starting in say October, 2011, it would become mandatory. Eventually - and it might take a full generation of players for 100 per cent compliance - everybody would be wearing a visor - and around 2030, somebody would be the answer to a trivia question in the same way Craig MacTavish is today (as the last player to play helmetless in the NHL).

Fact is, everybody playing hockey now grew up wearing a full cage throughout their formative years. And if visor use was mandatory, then there wouldn't be an issue or a stigma attached that there seems to be now.

Jarome Iginla had a couple of close calls with eye injuries early in his career; and after wavering a little bit about what to do, finally decided he would wear one for good.

As soon as he made the decision - and the commitment to persevere with the visor - it became second nature to him in fairly short order. The majority of the NHL's high-end players wear them anyway; if they can, everybody else can too - and should.

The risks are otherwise too great. Just ask Manny Malhotra.